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Creating a Vision for the Future of the Arts in Kentucky Begins to Take Shape



The long range planning for the Kentucky Arts Council, with intent for a statewide course of action, is nearing completion. The information gathering has been completed, the analysis is in progress, the findings are being reported back to the public, and "the plan" will be complete and ready for implementation by July 1, 2003. This date begins the Arts Council's fiscal year 2004, which aligns the dates for the Long Range Plan 2004-2008.

The first forum for dialogue took place in a joint meeting of the boards of Kentucky Arts Council, Kentucky Citizens for the Arts and

Arts Kentucky. The format for discussion was refined from that starting point and continued in public forums in thirteen communities across the commonwealth, including Ashland, Bowling Green, Henderson, Hopkinsville, Lexington, Louisville, Madisonville, Northern Kentucky, Paducah, Prestonsburg, Somerset and Winchester.

The facilitated discussion focused on the present goals of the Arts Council and how they might be statewide goals as well.

- Goal 1: **Education in the arts is provided.**
- Goal 2: **There is efficient statewide delivery of arts programs and services.**
- Goal 3: **Artists live and work in a supportive environment.**
- Goal 4: **The role of the arts in society is valued.**
- Goal 5: **Public policy is favorable to the arts in Kentucky.**

Further input was sought in response to the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center's report "Visioning Kentucky's Future: Measures and Milestones 2002" and how the arts might influence, benefit or be included in the top four issues that Kentuckians rank highest in importance.

1. *Safe and caring communities*
2. *Responsibility for family success*
3. *Accessible quality healthcare*
4. *Excellent system of lifelong learning*

"Safe and caring communities" seemed to be the easiest link for the arts, especially in the aftermath of September 11 and the healing and community involvement that took place because of, around and through the arts. "Family success" triggered the role of parent involvement in the schools through arts programming and the sense of pride in children with artistic accomplishment. The "healthcare" issue resounded strongly and almost bitterly with artists, as the accessibility to affordable healthcare for artists is practically non-existent. Most discussions led to the value of arts as a vehicle for any learning and the importance of arts in daily life.

Trends in Public Responses

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As the facilitator's notes came in from the public forums, certain discussion points seemed to find voice in communities across the state. These dominant points were also used to form response questions for an online survey. The results have been tabulated at the end of this article. The following is a summary of prevailing response trends in the meetings.

Education in the arts is provided.

As people talked about education they emphasized the need to have a cradle to grave approach in arts education. There was a desire for greater emphasis on the arts in early childhood education as well as professional development for those providers. There was a call for a strengthening of study in the arts in k-12, integrating the arts across the curricula to be included in every subject taught, better and more professional development opportunities for teachers, inclusion into the comprehensive planning process of schools and better partnerships between artists, arts organizations and the schools. Every community called for increased opportunities for adults and in particular seniors to learn about, create and participate in the arts.

There is efficient statewide delivery of arts programs and services.

Overall responses were very diverse with some overlap into education, value and advocacy issues. The predominant action steps for creating efficiency were better communications and an increase in the level and number of partnerships. Calls for better communications, information banks and directories were for both statewide efforts and local initiatives. Partnerships and collaborations were called for in every imaginable configuration between government agencies (local, state and federal), non-profits, businesses, schools, artists, arts organizations, media, advocacy groups, etc. There was praise for and a call for strengthening the Kentucky Arts Council Circuit Rider Program statewide. Western Kentucky communities felt they could be better served by the state. There was also a marked shift from the last long range planning sessions, recognizing that communities and local organizations would have to play a greater role in the delivery of the arts.

Artists live and work in a supportive environment.

Many of the responses indicated that the artist's needs to live and work in a supportive environment were similar to the needs of any Kentuckian or Kentucky business: Affordable health care, professional assistance for bettering business and marketing skills, incentives to keep business in Kentucky or in the local community. Other suggestions typified more unique challenges artists face on a daily basis: Providing a meeting place (physical or virtual) for artists to network and creating directories of artists at the community and state level ranked high in importance. There was also a call for local governments to lend greater support to artists and arts activities. Increased exhibition venues for visual artists, better inroads for working in the schools, and creating value for the arts beyond the value of the product were also cited as needs to accomplish this goal. The most interesting comment came from Louisville, "Stop harassing artists on the street!"

The role of the arts in society is valued as basic to life.

Although opinions varied widely on how to achieve the goal, a few common threads of discourse prevailed. Ongoing public awareness campaigns and connecting the value of the arts to daily lives as well as to economic development, tourism, education across the curriculums and community were deemed as important. It was suggested that replicating the "sports model" could be useful in developing art talent and arts programming and that the education community could be better informed about the positive options of choosing art careers. More public exposure to the arts whether it be public art, community arts programming or parental involvement in school-based arts activities were discussed as positively affecting the value of the arts. There was a call to remove barriers for participation by offering free admission programming and outreach to people beyond the arts center. Elements

of advocacy were mentioned in the discussion of this goal as well as the public policy goal.

Public policy is favorable to the arts in Kentucky.

A number of ideas emerged concerning the state legislature. Prominent were: Getting the legislators involved in organizations and school programs so they have hands on experience, and the need for arts people to become educated about the legislative process and the language needed to effectively communicate. There was a call for citizens to come up with talking points and a greater cooperation from arts organizations to face the legislature as a united front. Arts organizations can also coalesce to provide public candidate forums or at least attend forums to ask questions that will put the arts on the public policy radar screen. Local economic impact assessments were deemed necessary in making the case for the arts both to legislators and local government officials. It was stated that the definition of the arts needs to be broader to gain public policy support and artists, arts organizations and schools need to expand the level of recognition that is given for public funding support.

Online Survey Results

KAC also launched an online survey from December 1, 2002 to January 30, 2003, to gather further input from people that were not necessarily reached at the public meetings. The survey questions were formed from the ideas for action that sprang up from the public forums as prompted by the goals of the Arts Council. Such surveys are not scientifically valid but the responses do reflect the thoughts of the 191 respondents. Of those who chose to participate, 65 identified themselves as artists, arts administrators or arts board members, 83 identified themselves as educators, parents or students and 43 placed themselves in arts patrons and other categories.

Respondents generally agreed with every statement on the survey when asked to rate each statement according to the following scale: 1=strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= neutral, 4= disagree, 5= strongly disagree. This high agreement rate seems to reflect the validity of the ideas brought forth in the public forums. The lowest numbers for agreement comes from the vision statement of the Arts Council that the "people of Kentucky value and participate in the arts." Registering at an average of 2.27 indicates agreement, but the broadness of the statement probably affects the strength of the response.

Significantly high support was voiced for providing more opportunities for young people to come into contact with the arts and having the arts included in the Comprehensive Plans of schools. Having local governments support the arts registered strong agreement along with teaching the value of the arts beginning at the pre-K level.

Here are the responses. After each statement we give an index number which was derived from the average of all responses (The lower the number the higher the agreement).

Vision statement:

"The people of Kentucky value and participate in the arts." **2.27**

Goals:

- Lifelong education in the arts is provided.
- There is efficient statewide delivery of arts programs and services.
- Artists live and work in a supportive environment.
- The role of the arts in society is valued as basic to life.
- Public policy is favorable to the arts in Kentucky.

These are strong goals for the arts in Kentucky. **2.02**

Goal 1. Lifelong education in the arts is provided.

- Broaden the definition of the arts **2.18**
- Gather data on how arts are basic to our audience **1.91**
- Encourage partnerships that cross generations **1.43**
- Increase use of public resources, such as libraries **1.62**
- Provide more opportunities for young people to come into contact with the arts **1.19**
- Expand teacher education in the arts, and the university co-op intern programs **1.46**
- Sponsor more celebratory and participatory arts events **1.83**
- Help local organizations partner and support each other **1.48**
- Increase professional development in pre-service training **1.9**
- Provide more support for teachers on the KAC web site **2.01**
- Ensure that programs are relevant for communities undergoing business and demographic changes **1.82**
- Examine grant programs to determine the balance of all populations served **1.7**
- Make art inviting and accessible **1.38**
- Work to have the arts included in comprehensive plans in schools **1.29**

Goal 2. There is efficient statewide delivery of arts programs and services.

- Increase the role of KAC Circuit Riders **2.38**
- Create more awareness among corporations about the value of supporting the arts **1.46**
- Form strategic partnerships that cross cultural lines **1.51**
- Form strategic partnerships with non-arts groups, including faith-based organizations **2.43**
- Increase funding for collaborative projects **1.74**
- Work to have arts included in consolidated plans in schools **1.45**
- Expand the KAC web site to provide networking opportunities **1.94**

Goal 3. Artists live and work in a supportive environment

- Enhance local support for individual artists **1.63**
- Pass legislation to support "percent for art" in all state construction projects **2.12**
- Provide matching grants for local capacity building **1.97**
- Encourage sponsorship for individual artists **1.77**
- Provide more KAC support for individual artists **2.01**
- Provide support for programs that broaden options for artists living and working spaces **2.03**
- Increase marketing opportunities **1.66**
- Have artists represented on more decision-making bodies **1.85**
- Establish the equivalent of a Fund for the Arts for beginning artists and companies **2.13**
- Increase support to help artists learn effective business practices and marketing **1.79**
- Continue to investigate and advocate for affordable health insurance for artists **1.77**
- Work for greater support from local governments **1.66**
- Establish incentives for mentor programs **1.83**
- Establish job training programs and apprenticeships **1.83**
- Create directories of performing/visual artists by region across the state **1.61**
- Establish workshops for local government to broaden knowledge of how to support local artist community **1.84**

Goal 4. The role of the arts in society is valued as basic to life.

- Develop an aggressive media campaign to promote the arts **1.73**
- Have KAC advocate more for arts organizations **1.95**
- Involve the business community through specific programs **1.69**
- Establish arts districts in local communities **1.9**
- Educate the economic development entities in the state about the role of the arts **1.56**
- Have more public art **1.54**
- Connect the arts to heritage through music and folk tales **1.81**
- Encourage more intergenerational sharing of arts traditions **1.55**
- Increase communications across the arts **1.61**
- Provide information that links the role of the arts in scholastic achievement **1.51**
- Educate the arts community about the decision makers in education **1.69**

Goal 5. Public Policy is favorable to the arts in Kentucky

- Promote unity among arts organizations when approaching the legislature **1.54**
 - Emphasize the economic impact of the arts **1.42**
 - Support regional organizations focused on the arts **1.58**
 - Get to know how schools function **1.72**
 - Connect with local chambers of commerce **1.61**
 - Support Kentucky Citizens for the Arts **1.89**
 - Begin educating children at the pre-K level about the value of the arts **1.41**
 - Provide training in lobbying the legislature **1.97**
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